DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 482 113 HE 036 370

TITLE	Higher Education and University Research: Empowering Canadians and Their Communities. A Brief Submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.
INSTITUTION	Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, Ottawa (Ontario).
PUB DATE	2003-09-08
NOTE	9p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	*Educational Improvement; Foreign Countries; Futures (of Society); *Higher Education; *Research; Research Universities
IDENTIFIERS	*Canada

ABSTRACT

This brief describes the challenges facing higher education and university research in Canada. In recent years, the Canadian federal government has demonstrated that it understands the value of university research to Canada's competitiveness with new initiatives and ambitious goals for Canada's research performance. The realization of research targets will require building on recent federal initiatives. The far-sighted investments that the federal government has undertaken since 1997 have begun a major process of revitalization of Canada's university research effort. It is essential that the educational mission of Canadian universities be revitalized. The paramount issue is to ensure that universities have the institutional capacity to provide quality higher education to a growing number of students. (SLD)

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ED 482 113

Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada

Association des universités et collèges du Canada

Higher Education and University Research: Empowering Canadians and Their Communities

A brief submitted to the House of Commons
Standing Committee on Finance
by
the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada

September 8, 2003

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Established in 1911, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada represents 93 Canadian public and private not-for-profit universities and university-degree level colleges. Our mandate is to foster and promote the interests of higher education, both within Canada and abroad.

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In a world where change is constant, where people increasingly work in a global environment, and where ideas and knowledge are the currency of the day, higher education and research are the keys to Canada's future. University education and research broaden horizons, enhance our country's competitiveness and expand our understanding of the complex forces shaping our world. Knowledge is empowering: it builds the abilities and confidence of individuals and communities to grow, excel and turn the forces of change to their advantage. Its absence can be disenfranchising, too often resulting in fewer employment opportunities, longer periods of unemployment and lower income levels.

Pushing the Frontiers of Knowledge

Over the last several years, the federal government has demonstrated that it clearly understands the strategic value of university research to Canada's competitiveness with new initiatives and ambitious goals for Canada's research performance. Beginning in 1997, the federal government has put key elements of a sound foundation for research in place – support for research infrastructure through the creation of the Canada Foundation for Innovation; support for the direct costs of research through increases in the granting agency budgets and the commitment to at least double those budgets over the first decade of the 21st century; support for the recruitment, retention and development of world-class researchers through the Canada Research Chairs program and the new Canada Graduate Scholarships; and partial support for the indirect costs of research through the permanent program announced in the last budget. These initiatives have generated a new sense of excitement on university campuses, a turnaround from a decade ago when many feared that Canadian universities were in danger of becoming a research backwater. It is essential to maintain this momentum to enable Canadian researchers to push the frontiers of knowledge.

The realization of research targets will require building on recent federal initiatives.

For their part, universities have set ambitious collective targets, including a doubling of research performance and increasing knowledge transfer, including a tripling of commercialization. They have committed to public reporting through AUCC of their collective progress in meeting these targets. The realization of these targets and of the federal government's own ambitious goals with respect to research and development will require building on recent federal initiatives to ensure a healthy and supportive environment for university research and innovation. This will require action in several areas in the years to come, beginning with the next federal budget.

- In its 2003 budget, the federal government introduced a permanent program to fund the indirect costs of federally sponsored research, with $225 million allocated for each of the first three years of the program. Universities have

welcomed this investment, but the federal government has acknowledged that this level of funding covers only a portion of the indirect costs associated with research. Moreover, if the $225 million annual investment does not increase during the first three years, the rate of reimbursement will actually fall over time. This is because the amount reimbursed will be smaller relative to the continued growth in federal investment in the direct costs of research. Annual increases in the permanent indirect costs program will be necessary to enhance the effectiveness of university research and development in Canada, thereby contributing to its international competitiveness.

- The federal government has set targets of moving Canada's R&D performance from 15th to fifth in the world and of doubling funding for the three federal granting agencies between 2000 and 2010. While Canada has set these laudable targets, the rest of the world is not standing still. The European Commission, for example, recently adopted an action plan to increase investment in European R&D to approach three percent of GDP by 2010. For Canada, reaching the same target would require more than tripling our national spending on R&D, including granting agencies. The United States, too, is increasing its investments in R&D, threatening to further widen the gap of Canada's international competitiveness. Granting agency funding must grow at rates necessary to become internationally competitive in research. In terms of university-based research, this will mean more than doubling granting agency budgets between 2000 and 2010.

- Research and scholarship in the social sciences and humanities are essential to Canadians' understanding of themselves and of the complex social, political, economic and legal challenges that this country must confront in a global society. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council is poised to launch a transformation process to enhance the impact of its research for all Canadians. It is important to support this process. At the same time, the historic underfunding of research and scholarship in the social sciences and humanities has led to a serious erosion of research capacity relative to other disciplines. Proportionately larger funding increases for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada will help to reverse this erosion.

- Universities in all regions must be able to develop their research capacity to contribute to the social, cultural and economic development of their local and regional communities. Investments will be required to assist universities to develop their research capacity, to build their relationships with community partners, and to facilitate the growth of local and regional clusters.

- In creating the Canada Foundation for Innovation in 1997, the federal government recognized the need for infrastructure support in Canadian universities and other research institutions. Unfortunately, the number of worthy projects far outstrips CFI's ability to provide support. In addition, the costs of sustaining large-scale research infrastructure over time are rising significantly. Without adequate on-going support, the initial investment in research infrastructure could be rendered

less effective. Canadian researchers also need access to international research infrastructure if they are to play a leading role in international collaboration efforts.

- Meeting the federal government's research targets will require growing numbers of university researchers. While some of this need can be met by recruiting abroad, it will be essential that Canada increase the numbers of young people in this country who pursue graduate studies and research careers, in part by encouraging promising undergraduates to consider a research career. The federal government has taken a significant step forward in announcing new graduate scholarships in its 2003 budget, but over time more support for graduate studies remains essential.

A Canadian Higher Learning Strategy

The far-sighted investments that the federal government has undertaken since 1997 have begun a major process of revitalization of Canada's university research effort. Given the importance of higher education to this country's long-term prospects, it is essential that the educational mission of our universities be similarly revitalized.

> *It is essential that the educational mission of our universities be revitalized.*

Higher education has made a striking difference to Canada and the lives of Canadians. According to recent census data, there is a real premium on higher education, with university graduates earning an average of $1 million more over their lifetimes than do high school graduates. A generation ago, Canada positioned itself to create a competitive advantage by expanding its postsecondary systems. We have long been proud of our universities – accessible, high-quality across the country, and open to Canadians from all walks of life.

In all parts of the country, Canadians recognize that accessible, high-quality higher education is vital to their future, and that of their children and their communities. University graduates pay more taxes and are key to the economic health of the country. From a public policy perspective, there is a growing awareness that investment in higher education enhances the country's long-term prospects for economic growth and wealth generation. Indeed, investments in higher education are essential to ensure that Canadians have the resources and that governments have the revenues available to provide for the long-term viability of our health and social services. Canadians expect governments – and educational institutions – to respond.

AUCC projects that the demand for a university education will grow by at least 30 percent – or 200,000 full-time students – between 2001 and 2011. This growth is due not only to demographic changes but to increased participation within the traditional

university-age cohort to fuel the growing demand for the skills and expertise that university graduates can provide in the labour market. This increasing demand is already placing severe strains on the institutional capacity of our universities.

In addition, Canada's universities are expected to be leaders in encouraging access for all learners – from young people who enter university directly from high school or CEGEP to others who study part-time, to adults who want to take advantage of the opportunities that higher education affords its graduates. It is vital that no Canadians be denied the opportunity to benefit from a university education. Our country cannot afford to disenfranchise segments of our society, such as students from low-income families, Aboriginal Canadians, or individuals with disabilities. Broadening access, however, implies a further increase in demand, which will place even greater pressures on universities' institutional capacity.

The paramount issue for higher education in Canada is to ensure that universities have the institutional capacity they need to teach a growing numbers of students. The ability of Canadian universities to meet the challenges of increasing student participation, broadening accessibility, and developing the global skills and knowledge that students will require to thrive in today's world – in short, ensuring that universities provide Canadians with high-quality education – will depend fundamentally on increased investments in institutional capacity.

The paramount issue for higher education in Canada is to ensure that universities have the institutional capacity to provide quality higher education to a growing numbers of students.

There are two components to this capacity challenge. First, universities need more teachers. Second, they need more classroom and laboratory space. AUCC's analysis shows that universities will need to hire almost 40,000 new faculty members by 2011. This is made up in part of at least 10,000 more faculty members to respond to the enrolment growth we expect. An additional 20,000 faculty will be needed to replace those no longer in the system through retirement and other attrition. And universities will need to find up to 10,000 more faculty members to meet the growing demand for university research and to improve the quality of the educational and research experiences of those who will attend university in the coming years.

With respect to the need for space, the growth in students and faculty further implies a need for additional classrooms and laboratories, libraries and residences to house the university community and facilitate the work of that community. Universities will need additional new buildings and will need to upgrade older facilities. For example, the Canadian Association of University Business Officers identified at least $3.6 billion in accumulated deferred maintenance at Canadian universities in a study released in 2000.

New infrastructure, both physical and technological, will meet the 21st century learning requirements of our campuses.

Without adequate investment in institutional capacity, either accessibility or quality – or both – will suffer. In the 1980s, the OECD reported that Canada ranked as one of the leading nations in the world in university participation levels, just after the United States. As the result of enrolment growth restrictions in this country, combined with very rapid increases in university participation in many other OECD countries, our ranking has now dropped substantially. In fact, today approximately 19 percent of 18 to 21-year-olds in Canada are participating in university education – a figure that puts us in the middle of the pack. Our participation rates are well behind the top five nations of the OECD, all of which have surpassed or are rapidly approaching the 25 percent mark.

Canada has already fallen behind in terms of the relative levels of government support for Canadian universities when compared to support for U.S. public universities. A very significant funding gap emerged in the 1980s and then grew rapidly throughout the 1990s. By 2001, U.S. state and federal governments were providing almost 30 percent more support per student than they did two decades earlier. In contrast, Canadian governments were providing 20 percent *less* support in real per student terms. Moreover, despite increases in other revenue sources – primarily tuition fees – Canadian universities have fallen further and further behind their U.S. counterparts in total revenues per student. As a consequence, universities in this country began to face more and more overcrowding, threatening the quality of their undergraduate programs, and many restricted enrolment growth in the mid-1990s. In the last four years, provincial governments have begun to provide some additional revenues to help universities begin to respond to rising enrolment demand but much more needs to be done.

Crowding more students into existing campus facilities without attention to the quality of the educational experience is clearly not the answer. Canada's universities are called upon to provide the kind of quality education needed in a global future: active and collaborative learning experiences, high quality interactions among students and faculty and a strategic international component that will give our graduates a broad understanding of today's world. This will require more faculty and more staff to provide new and enhanced student services, including outreach and mentoring programs for non-traditional students; first-year experience programs to help young people make the transition to higher education; study skills and academic counselling services – all designed to help students not just enrol, but succeed.

The federal government has an opportunity to provide for the education mission of universities the kind of leadership it has shown with respect to university research. Provinces, for their part, will need to make sure that universities have the necessary operating resources to ensure quality while meeting enrolment pressures and encouraging broader access. Universities must make the best and most effective use of these resources. We propose the development of a Canadian Higher Learning Strategy involving action in a number of areas over the next several years:

- The federal government can help the provinces and the universities to address the institutional capacity challenge through a Higher Education Renewal Fund. Meeting the renewal challenge would be a significant undertaking for the federal government and would entail a long-term commitment that would include new program development at the federal level as well as a concerted effort to negotiate agreements with provincial governments to provide for appropriate levels of public accountability, transparency and flexibility while ensuring funds address capacity needs.

- The components of a Higher Education Renewal Fund can be developed over a number of years. The Health Care Renewal Accord 2003 provides a possible model. Broad elements of the Fund might include the development of a dedicated federal-provincial transfer mechanism over and above the Canada Social Transfer, with provisions designed to address faculty growth and other capacity-related needs, as well as dedicated federal funds in such areas as physical and technological infrastructure.

- Individuals from non-traditional groups will need appropriate supports and incentives to pursue and complete a higher education in a timely manner. More generally, all qualified Canadians should have access to the financial resources necessary to encourage them to pursue and complete a higher education. At the federal level, useful measures could include reform of the Canada Student Loans Program to better meet student needs, an enhanced system of grants, and targeted federal programming for Aboriginal, disabled and low-income students.

- Students need exposure to ideas and people from cultures around the world in order to build understanding, awareness and cross-cultural skills. At the same time, employers value and seek graduates with skills relevant for business in a globalized context, including an in-depth knowledge of the world, critical thinking, second and even third languages, cross-cultural understanding, and problem-solving. These skills are enhanced through high-quality academic programs in an interactive research environment that engages and challenges students through exposure to diverse perspectives of international students and scholars. Canadian students gain tremendous benefits from opportunities to study abroad, including exposure to "best practices" in other countries, a more tolerant attitude, as well as greater cultural sensitivity and knowledge. The federal government is well positioned to introduce initiatives that provide more Canadian students with the opportunity to participate in international exchanges, co-op and work experience programs.

Conclusion

Working together, the federal government, Canada's universities and other partners have achieved a great deal in developing the tools with which university research is contributing to the needs of a knowledge society. We need to consolidate and build upon these achievements. We must also begin the work of revitalizing higher education by addressing the issues of institutional capacity, accessibility, and global skills and

knowledge. In the same spirit of partnership that has led to our success in research, universities, federal and provincial governments, and other stakeholders must come together, develop a robust strategy for higher education, and over time implement a series of measures that will further enrich our society, enhance our competitiveness, improve our quality of life, and provide opportunities for all Canadians.

We recognize that this is an ambitious goal, and we expect that it may take a number of years to reach fruition. In making this proposal, we invite the federal government to consider the first steps it might take in the near term, and we look forward to a continued constructive dialogue in the years to come.

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